

## **Amherst Leisure Services and Supplemental Education Department (LSSE)**

**Fiscal Year 2002**

### **Community Service Awards, Philanthropy Awards and Volunteers**

#### ***Community Service Awards***

In 1996, LSSE began the tradition of bestowing well-deserved praise and recognition upon community members who had made outstanding contributions to the quality of Amherst's recreation programs. This tradition continues, and in FY 02 the following LSSE honorees were thanked for their community service:

- The Amherst Leisure Services Community Theater Advisory Board received LSSE's FY 02 *Arts and Supplemental Education Award*. This board has worked tirelessly to provide financial resources, organization, leadership and vision to the LSSE Community Theater.
- Nate Murray received LSSE's FY 02 *Youth Basketball Coach of the Year Award*. Nate has given 15 years of volunteer support and a lifetime of coaching experience to the youth of his many basketball teams.
- Dave Orrell received LSSE's "*Star in the Valley*" Award at the Amherst Chamber of Commerce Annual Dinner. "Support above and beyond the call of duty" barely begins to describe the efforts that Dave Orrell, DPW Parks Foreman, has made and continues to make to benefit the schools, parks, and recreation areas. Without Dave's considerable labors, many of the community's most treasured programs and places would look very different.

#### ***Philanthropy Awards***

Northampton Cooperative Bank was LSSE's nominee for and eventual winner of the 2001 Hampshire County *Philanthropist of Distinction Award*. Northampton Cooperative Bank has provided years of sponsorship and community support to numerous Hampshire County organizations, including LSSE. LSSE was proud to call attention to and salute Northampton Cooperative Bank for their endeavors.

Claudia Pazmany was LSSE's recipient of the *Partners in Philanthropy Award*. Claudia's fundraising and volunteer efforts helped to bring the revitalized Mill River Community Playground to fruition. Claudia was honored with this special recognition at the 2001 Philanthropy Day program sponsored by the Western Massachusetts Chapter of Fundraising Professionals.

### ***Volunteers***

The previously named volunteers stand out for their achievements; however, all of LSSE's volunteers deserve recognition for their role in expanding Amherst's recreational base. LSSE staff work closely with more than 800 volunteers annually. These coordinated efforts make possible both more cost-effective and better-supervised programs. Without volunteers, it would be impossible to fund some of these programs. In return, LSSE's volunteers gain a sense of well-being and pride from their enthusiastic participation in and development of major community programs, events and activities. LSSE volunteers can be found coaching youth sports, supporting special events, chaperoning youth programs, assisting individuals with special needs, spearheading fundraisers and more.

### **Administration and Facilities**

LSSE's web site, [www.lsse.org](http://www.lsse.org), continues to grow in popularity and usefulness. In FY 02, a total of 25,378 visits were made to LSSE's web site, more than doubling FY 01's tally of 10,770 visits. Online LSSE registrations also continued to burgeon, with more than 310 registrations occurring by way of the web.

FY 02 brought a significant staff change for LSSE. When the full-time Aquatics Program Coordinator position was vacated by Tim DeRose, it became difficult to fill this vacancy due to the serious budget climate. Stringent cuts were made in the indoor and outdoor aquatics programs; the Aquatics Program Coordinator position, approved in the course of the school year five months after the vacancy occurred, was reduced to 25 hours. The position was filled by Kimberly Bennett. Although great effort was put toward maintaining services while the position was vacant, momentum was lost in the spring and the busiest aquatics season, summer, began with fits and starts.

Major steps were taken toward completing three capital projects. These included the Mill River basketball court resurfacing project, the Mill River playground and the Kiwanis Park soccer field. These projects experienced initial setbacks due to an active building climate and higher than anticipated public bids. The Mill River basketball court resurfacing project was bid in the fall of 2002, but no responses were received. The project was successfully rebid in the winter. The project began in June and was scheduled to be completed by August. The Kiwanis Park soccer field also lost a season when the grading bid was left open due to a lack of bidders in the fall. The project, which had been started with volunteer help, was then rebid in the winter and continued in the spring. The project is expected to be completed by fall 2003, with play projected to start a year later. The Mill River playground project made strides in the fall, when volunteers installed the playground equipment and the safety surfacing over a two-weekend period. DPW lent a hand by removing all of the old equipment; however, after bidding unsuccessfully, it was determined that funds were insufficient for completing the accessible pathways portion of the project. Fall Town Meeting voted to appropriate \$14,000 to complete the project. A volunteer-led fundraising campaign added to the funds and amenities, such as park benches and trees, which are scheduled to arrive in the fall.

In the fall of 2002, the LSSE Commission unanimously approved the preliminary designs for four soccer fields at the Plumbrook Recreation Area. The design includes extensive grading, irrigation and a parking area. Funds to complete the project are needed before moving further.

### **Grants and Sponsorships**

In FY 02, grants were received from the following state, local and private sources:

- The Amherst Cultural Council
- The Amherst Club
- The Massachusetts Cultural Council
- McKesson Corporation

Additional development activities involving special events, a direct mail campaign, and ad sales, increased fundraising revenue by 56%. The 501(c)(3) process to revive the *Friends of Amherst Recreation* organization was also completed in FY 02. This should accelerate future fundraising efforts.

### **Youth and Adult Sports**

In FY 02, LSSE launched another successful year of youth sports programs. These included 15 summer sports camps comprised of nine different sports. Unique among these was the Department's first overnight camp – the National Ultimate Training Camp, directed by Tiina Booth. This popular first-year camp, held at the University of Massachusetts, registered 24 campers, with many of the attendees coming from numerous out-of-state locations. Other notable programs included the youth basketball league with 747 players, and the youth downhill ski and snowboard programs with 236 participants. The Youth Softball Program began this past spring for the first time under the leadership of LSSE; 164 participants were involved. A total of 399 adult players and 184 youth players participated in the youth and adult Ultimate partnership.

The adult sports program also generated great enthusiasm; with the exception of the adult basketball league, all leagues continued. The Drop In Basketball Program continued with a one- and two-day program year round, as did the Drop In Volleyball Program. Approximately 12,750 participated in these two informal programs. The Adult Volleyball League continued with 27 teams and the Adult Softball Program included 31 teams.

### **Youth and Adult Education Programs**

The number of adult and youth supplemental education programs increased by 13%, with 25% more participants than in FY 01. A total of 1,953 students participated in at least one of the 221 LSSE classes or arts collaborations. In addition to the continuation of the successful arts collaboration with the Mudpie Center for Visual Arts, LSSE also teamed up with the Fiber Arts Center, the Red Barn Studio and the Synthesis Center, to offer a greater variety of youth and adult education programs.

## **Aquatics**

As stated earlier, the absence of an Aquatics Program Coordinator in FY 02 for 5 months, and just prior to the opening of the summer season, negatively affected the smooth transition of programs from school year to summer. The school year swimming lesson program also witnessed a disturbing drop in enrollment, perhaps due to the lack of personnel. The youth lesson enrollment was down from 550 to 447 participants, and the adult program dropped from 110 to 76 participants.

Nevertheless, important safety and fitness programs continue to be taught, including lifeguarding, water aerobics, and preschool, youth and adult swimming lessons for all ability levels.

## **After-School and Vacation Youth Programs**

LSSE's two afterschool programs, the Wildwood After-School Program and the Prime Time After-School Program, continued to successfully operate at maximum or near-maximum capacity. This valuable childcare opportunity provided 60 children, on average, with safe, enriching, and affordable after-school activities.

Two vacation camps were also held at Wildwood School this year, with new programs stimulating increased interest, including an opportunity to attend a winter overnight camping trip in Otis, Massachusetts.

Enrollment in LSSE's three day camps increased significantly FY 02, with an increase of 206 campers over the previous fiscal year. These important summer offerings drew 82 special needs campers in the Adventure Playground (AP), Early Adventures and Outdoor Challenge programs. LSSE also recorded a marked increase in the number of families securing financial assistance in FY 02. Among AP campers, 61% needed financial assistance, as well as 41% of Early Adventures. The Outdoor Challenge program remained constant, with 34% requesting additional need.

## **Performing Arts and Special Events**

The Amherst Leisure Services Community Theater gave a highly professional performance of the play "The Secret Garden." The volunteer-led program included ensemble singing, superb acting, and stunning costumes. The Valley Light Opera again utilized LSSE's expertise in promotion and box office sales. The Gilbert and Sullivan musical, "The Grand Duke," was performed over a two-weekend period, with ticket sales between LSSE's Community Theater and the VLO show reaching a total of 6,432.

"Late, Lost and Laughable," an original collection of comic performances, was created and performed by members of the Rainbow Players in May 2002. The Rainbow Players, LSSE's performing arts group, continues to entertain the general community while increasing the quality of life for its members with special needs.

Youthful artists continued to find pleasure in “painting the Town” at the annual window-painting special event that has marked each Amherst Halloween celebration for the past 29 years. An interesting addition to the Department’s annual Halloween Special Event came about on the initiative of an Amherst College student. Amity Street was partly closed to traffic, and, following a Department-sponsored parade, a rendition of the song “Thriller” was performed with the Amherst Cinema Center as the backdrop. The performance concluded with music and a celebration at the Bangs Community Center. LSSE’s two summertime special events, Hot Summer Nights and the Fourth of July Fireworks Celebration, offered thousands of community members an opportunity to relax with their neighbors. Amherst’s Fireworks Celebration was rescheduled for the first time in more than two decades in view of the convincing but unfulfilled threat of inclement weather.

### **Special Needs**

Staff training this past year for one-on-one special needs assistants was increased. Operating guidelines for working with children with special needs were reviewed and revised. Procedures and policies were also developed to guide the working relationship between LSSE programming staff and the Special Needs Director. Forty-five children with special needs received assistance while enrolled in LSSE’s programs. One hundred and ten adults participated in either the Open Arms Programs or The Boltwood Project activities.

The special needs area within LSSE continued to be supported by a number of dedicated volunteers. A total of 52 volunteers assisted with one or more of the programs. Two committed University of Massachusetts volunteers received the Chancellor’s Community Service Award for their leadership and service.

For the past year, the grant-supported After-School Enrichment Program was organized by the LSSE Special Needs Director with the help of student volunteers and provided non-competitive games and theater activities as a means of promoting inclusion. Unfortunately, this program fell victim to the difficult state budget cuts in FY 02. The program was dramatically cut back in December and discontinued in June.

### **Summary**

FY 02 saw new programs, new participants, new staff and new challenges. Progress was made in either completing or moving forward several capital projects. The Aquatics program was negatively affected by the loss of a program coordinator for 5 months just prior to the beginning of the summer programs. Even more challenges lie ahead for Aquatics, with a reduced schedule planned for the FY 03 school year. The use of vouchers for after-school and summer programs increased from 28 to 40, which may be a signal that the poor economy is now affecting families locally. While 6,272 registrations were accepted in FY 02, 113 people remained on waiting lists—pointing to a need to do still more.

Linda Chalfant  
Director